

VOTE - Voter Outreach Through Education Washington Secretary of State

CURRICULUM GRADES 5-7

TEACHER: LESSON 1

THEME: VOTING IS EVERYONE'S DUTY

This is a project that could be completed by students from grades 5-7. A number of ideas and activities are presented in five lessons to form one complete civics curriculum. Individual teachers are free to add, subtract, or edit as they wish, depending on their interests, time constraints, and local conditions.

Rationale for a project approach to increase interest and participation in voting:

- A. Students who participate in in-depth, project-based activities that they can "sink their teeth into" are likely to learn more, retain it longer, and apply it more effectively when they leave the classroom. This should help improve WASL scores and increase the likelihood that students will become active voters at age eighteen.
- B. Beginning with the entering ninth grade class of 2004, all Washington State high school students will be required to complete a Culminating Project in order to graduate. Having students "think project" in the earlier grades will help prepare them for this graduation requirement.
- C. Projects require students to use higher order thinking skills, which is a goal of education reform in Washington State.

ACTIVITY:

Tell students that the class will be involved in a project about the importance of voting. Inform students that they will be working in groups (teams) of five on the voting project, with each team having a specific subject to cover. Tell them also that each team will have the following members:

- A. A manager/time keeper, to keep everyone on task;
- B. A recorder/summarizer, to take notes so good ideas are not lost;
- C. A reporter, who will inform the class about the group's progress; and
- D. A representative/liaison, who will visit other groups from time to time, and bring back suggestions to the home group;
- E. Observers, all other students are observers, and they give periodic feedback about how the group is progressing.

Ask students to determine the "fairest" way to form the groups/teams. (See STUDENT LESSON ONE) Generate alternatives and ask them to vote on the fairest method. Note: The fairest way might not be the way students would like it to be. If they have difficulty deciding on what is meant by fair, let them know that this is why we have elections. People have different ideas about a lot of things, and in our country, differences are often settled (or at least softened) by voting.

Engage the students in a discussion about the topic. Students could come up with a variety of project titles, then vote on the one they like best. (See STUDENT LESSON ONE) Examples might be:

- A. "Why Everyone Should Vote,"
- B. "Voting is Everyone's Duty,"
- C. "If You Don't Vote, Don't Complain,"
- D. "Voting Isn't Just a Right, It's a Responsibility."

Possible questions, leading to sub-topics:

- A. Some people vote regularly. Others vote rarely, if at all. Why is this?
- B. People from ages 18-24 vote least. If people in this age group want to be treated as adults, why don't they vote?
- C. If voting is so important, should people be fined or punished in some way for not voting?
- D. What happens when only a few people vote?
- E. What kind of campaign would it take to encourage more people to vote?
- F. Ask students to come up with other questions.

Throughout the project, students will be sharing their beliefs and viewpoints on the importance of voting and will be eliciting similar information from others.

One thing to look for might be how students' beliefs, viewpoints and interest levels change, as they get further into the project. For example:

- "I didn't know how important a school board election was, until I got into this project."
- "I didn't know that our county has a different sales tax than some other counties, because of the way people voted."
- "I thought all adults voted, until I started interviewing people."

After each of the five groups has reported, ask them to discuss how they learned to handle conflict, cooperate, and depend on each other to perform their assigned task.

Ask each student to describe one important thing they learned, and how that will affect their future voting behavior (or the behavior of

others). Doing this orally will have a greater impact than doing it in writing. Students can hear each other (which is reinforcing), and the teacher can make summarizing remarks along the way, e.g., "So at least four of you are going to encourage your parents to vote more often," "Many of you are looking forward to the day you can register to vote."

During the project, use language such as "When you are a voter," "After you become a registered voter," "When you become an active citizen voter." The purpose here is to imprint and reinforce the idea that every student will someday be voting.

At the conclusion of the project, ask students to "Provide examples of conflict, cooperation, and interdependence among individuals, groups, and nations."

Desired outcome from the project is that students will be able to describe the importance of being an active and informed voter and will make plans to become voters when they reach age eighteen.